

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for providing communication services, comprising:
 - receiving a request from a hearing-impaired party for establishing a communication link to a hearing party;
 - identifying a communication assistant;
 - forwarding the request to the communication assistant;
 - establishing, by the communication assistant, a communication link to the hearing-impaired party using an instant messaging program;
 - establishing, by the communication assistant, a voice link with the hearing party;
 - receiving, by the communication assistant, voice messages from the hearing party via the voice link;
 - generating instant messages, by the communication assistant, the instant messages corresponding to the voice messages; and
 - transmitting the instant messages to the hearing-impaired party.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 - receiving, by the communication assistant, instant messages from the hearing-impaired party; and
 - transmitting, by the communication assistant, voice messages to the hearing party, the voice messages corresponding to the received instant messages.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the request from the hearing-impaired party is received via a packet-switched network from a device executing an instant messaging program.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the request from the hearing-impaired party is received via the Internet.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
transmitting an interface screen to the hearing-impaired party in response to the request, the interface screen including a telephone number input area for allowing the hearing-impaired party to input a telephone number for the hearing party.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the interface screen includes a selection area for allowing the hearing-impaired party to select an instant messaging program with which to communicate with the communication assistant.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the interface screen includes a user name area for allowing the hearing-impaired party to input an e-mail address identifying an address to which the communication assistant will send instant messages.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the voice link from the communication assistant to the hearing party comprises a voice over Internet Protocol link.

9. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
establishing a conference call between the hearing-impaired party, the communication assistant and the hearing party, the conference call utilizing voice over Internet Protocol.

10. A system, comprising:

a server configured to:

receive a request from a hearing-impaired party for establishing a communication link to a hearing party,

identify a first communication assistant, and

forward the request; and

a first device associated with the first communication assistant, the first device being configured to:

receive the request from the server,

establish a communication link to the hearing-impaired party using a text messaging program, and

establish a voice link with the hearing party.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein the server is further configured to:

transmit an interface screen to the hearing-impaired party in response to the request, the interface screen including a first area for allowing the hearing-impaired party to input a telephone number for the hearing party.

12. The system of claim 11, wherein the interface screen includes a second area for allowing the hearing-impaired party to select a text messaging program with which to communicate with the first communication assistant.

13. The system of claim 12, wherein the interface screen includes a third area for allowing the hearing-impaired party to input an e-mail address identifying an address to which the first communication assistant will send text messages.

14. The system of claim 10, wherein the first device comprises a workstation, the first device being further configured to:

receive voice messages from the hearing party via the voice link, and transmit instant messages to the hearing-impaired party, the instant messages being input by the first communication assistant and corresponding to the received voice messages.

15. The system of claim 14, wherein the first device is further configured to:
receive instant messages from the hearing-impaired party, and
transmit voice messages to the hearing party, the transmitted voice messages corresponding to the received instant messages.

16. The system of claim 10, wherein the request from the hearing-impaired party is received via a packet-switched network from a device executing an instant messaging program.

17. The system of claim 10, wherein the request from the hearing-impaired party is received via the Internet.

18. The system of claim 10, wherein the first device is further configured to establish the voice link from the first communication assistant to the hearing party using voice over Internet Protocol.

19. The system of claim 10, wherein the first device is further configured to: establish a conference call between the hearing-impaired party, the first communication assistant and the hearing party, the conference call utilizing voice over Internet Protocol.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein the conference call is configured to link the hearing-impaired party, the first communication assistant and the hearing party in at least one of a hearing carry over environment, a voice carry over environment and a speech-to-speech environment.

21. A computer-readable medium having stored thereon a plurality of sequences of instructions, said sequences of instructions including sequences of instructions which, when executed by a processor, cause said processor to:

receive a request associated with a hearing-impaired party for establishing a communication link to a hearing party;
establish a communication link to the hearing-impaired party using a text messaging program; and
establish a voice link to the hearing party.

22. The computer-readable medium of claim 21, including instructions for further causing the processor to:

receive voice messages from the hearing party via the voice link; and
transmit, in response to received voice messages, instant messages to the hearing-impaired party, the instant messages corresponding to the voice messages.

23. The computer-readable medium of claim 21, including instructions for further causing the processor to:

receive instant messages from the hearing-impaired party; and
display the instant messages.

24. The computer-readable medium of claim 21, including instructions for further causing the processor to:

receive voice messages from the hearing party via the voice link;
automatically generate text messages corresponding to the voice messages;
transmit the text messages to the hearing-impaired party;
receive text messages from the hearing-impaired party;
automatically generate voice messages corresponding to the received text messages; and
transmit the voice messages to the hearing party.

25. The computer-readable medium of claim 21, wherein when establishing a voice link, the instructions cause the processor to:

establish the voice link using voice over Internet Protocol.

26. The computer-readable medium of claim 21, wherein when establishing a voice link, the instructions further cause the processor to:

establish a conference call between the hearing-impaired party, a communication assistant and the hearing party, the voice link utilizing at least one of the Internet and the public switched telephone network.

27. A system, comprising:

means for receiving a request from a hearing-impaired party for establishing a communication link to a hearing party; and

means for transmitting an interface screen to the hearing-impaired party in response to the request, the interface screen including an input area for allowing the hearing-impaired party to input a telephone number for the hearing party and a selection area for allowing the hearing-impaired party to select a text messaging program with which to communicate.

28. The system of claim 27, wherein the interface screen includes a user name area for allowing the hearing-impaired party to input an address to which a communication assistant will send text messages.

29. The system of claim 27, further comprising:

means for identifying a communication assistant to assist the hearing-impaired party; and

means for forwarding the request to the identified communication assistant.

30. A method, comprising:

receiving a request from a hearing-impaired party for establishing a communication link to a hearing party; and
transmitting an interface screen to the hearing-impaired party in response to the request, the interface screen including a selection area for allowing the hearing-impaired party to select a text messaging program with which to communicate with a communication assistant.

31. The method of claim 30, further comprising:

establishing a communication link from the communication assistant to the hearing-impaired party; and
communicating with the hearing-impaired party via instant messages.

32. The method of claim 30, further comprising:

establishing a full duplex communication link with the hearing-impaired party; and
communicating with the hearing-impaired party over the full duplex communication link using text messages.